

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

PRELIMINARY REPORT
ON
MIGRATORY WORKERS
IN THE COTTON AREAS OF
NEW MEXICO

PREPARED BY
M. S. KISTIN
LABOR DIVISION

May, 1941

This document has been prepared for the use of officials of the Farm Security Administration in their consideration of the problem with which it deals. Any opinions expressed are those of the author. This report is not intended for general circulation and the publication of its contents in whole or in part is forbidden.

2 2 2 2 2
2 2 2 2 2
2 2 2 2 2

ANNE
2011

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
Summary and Conclusions.....	1 - 4
Cotton Farms in New Mexico.....	5 - 8
The Need for Outside Labor.....	9 - 15
Extent of the Additional Labor Requirement.....	16 - 18
The "Labor Shortage", 1940.....	19
The Future Labor Requirement.....	20 - 22
Composition of Migrant and Resident Farm Labor Population.....	23 - 29
Income, Days Worked, and Wages.....	30 - 33
Housing.....	34 - 38
Health.....	39 - 40
Education.....	41 - 45
Social Participation.....	46 - 47
Community Attitudes.....	48 - 50

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Dona Ana County has five times as many cotton farms as Chaves County, but less than twice as much acreage in cotton. This is because Dona Ana has much smaller holdings.

2. With smaller and many more holdings, Dona Ana County has a larger local labor supply and consequently needs less additional outside labor during harvest time.

3. Even with improved methods of recruiting and employing labor, both areas would still be dependent upon an outside labor supply.

4. Under conditions as of 1940, an additional force of 1500 cotton pickers is required in Dona Ana County and at least 2300 in Chaves County. This would mean a total migrant population of at least 2200 persons in Dona Ana County of which 150 would normally be unattached workers; and a total migrant population of about 4000 in Chaves County of which 350 would normally be unattached workers.

5. Chaves County will continue to require approximately the same amount of additional labor. Because of the expansion in 1941 of long staple cotton, Dona Ana County will require more outside labor than ever before.

6. Housing facilities generally are neither sufficient nor adequate to provide a minimum decency of shelter and living conditions for migratory workers in either of the two counties surveyed.

7. Especially in view of the poor housing and living conditions, wages in cotton in New Mexico are not sufficiently attractive to invite and keep a relatively stable outside labor force for the harvest.

1. When do you think is the latest you should be through with your harvest? Why?

2. Do you use tractors or teams?

3. Do you think the harvest can be handled in this area without migrant pickers? (Within the time as indicated in answer to question 1, above.)

The sample of 49 farm operators enumerated with the farm operator schedule indicated the following opinion regarding the time the harvest season should be completed:

By the end of December - 27 farmers
(By November 15 - 1 farmer;
November 15 - 30 - 1 farmer;
By December 15 - 3 farmers;
December 15 to 30 - 22 farmers.)

By January 15 - 10 farmers.

By the end of January - 5 farmers.

A scattering of opinion as follows:

"January" - 1 farmer
"December 14 to January 15" - 1 farmer
"January to February" - 1 farmer
"February" - 1 farmer

No response reported - 3 farmers

Opinion seems for the most part to limit the end of the season to the end of December. Although some variation existed, the general y seemed to be for tractor farmers to be willing to consider season in view of their ability to work their land more

In response to the third question, a substantial majority of farmers in the enumerated sample, as well as those farmers interviewed, but not enumerated, were of the opinion that migrant workers were essential to the success of their cotton harvest. In the random sample of 79 farmers enumerated, 33 expressed the unqualified opinion that the cotton harvest could not be handled without the migratory labor. The remaining 16 farmers in the enumerated sample reacted as

3 farm operators - Local labor could handle the crop if they were taken off relief and WPA and consequently made to work in the cotton fields.

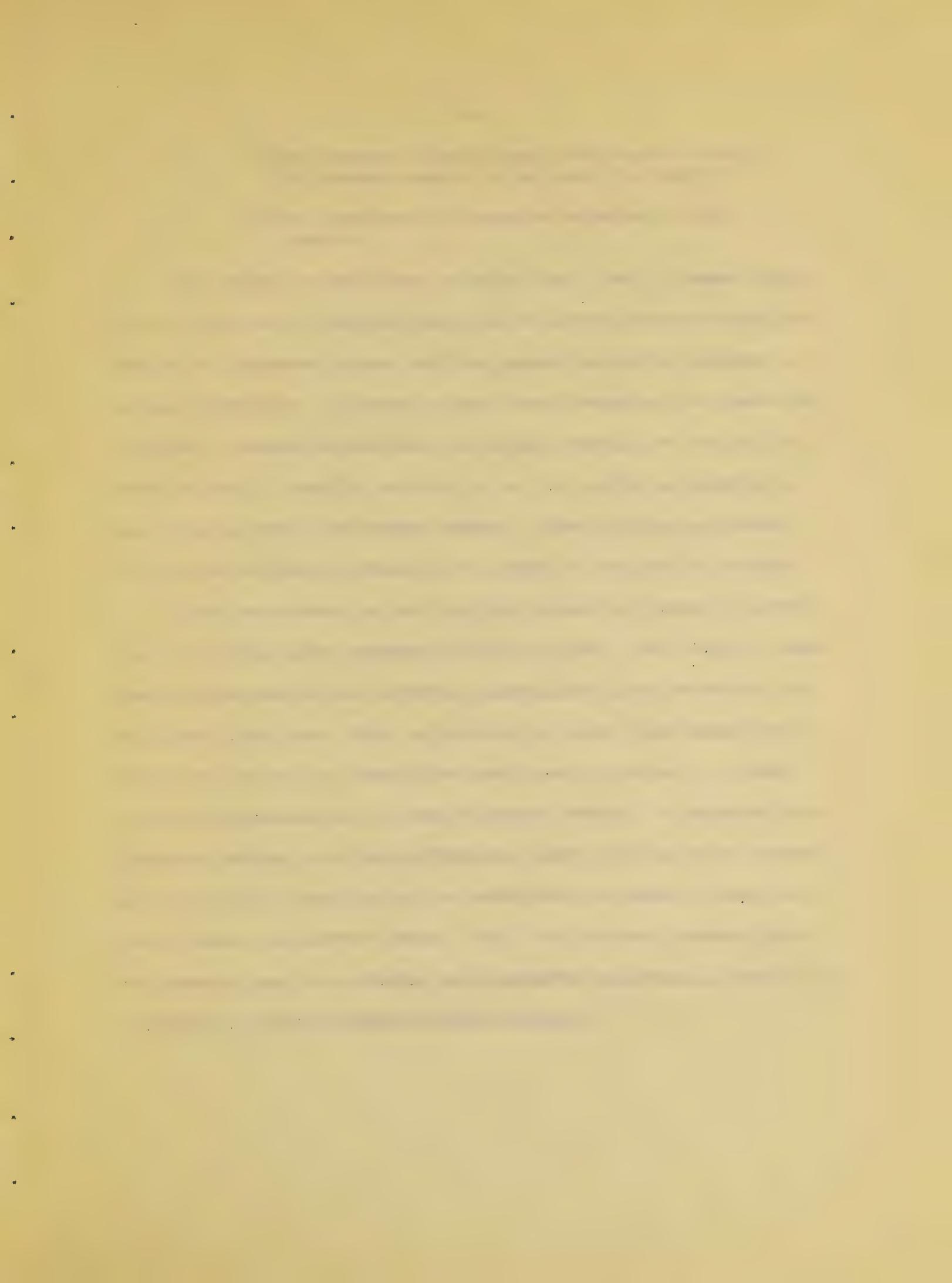
4 farm operators - Local labor can handle the crop; prefer local labor and use it because it's more

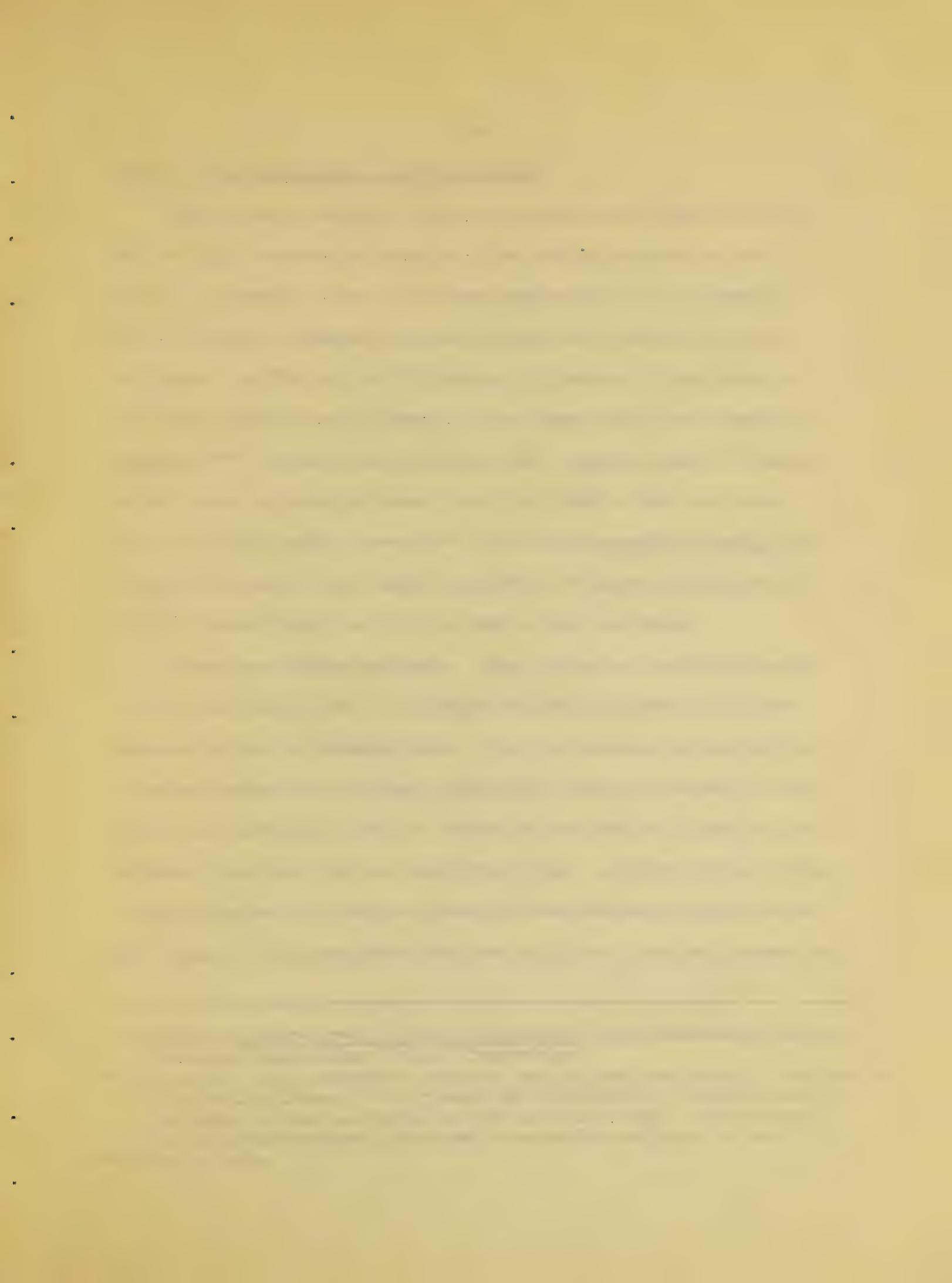
3 farm operators - Can manage without migrant labor themselves, but believe the valley as a whole cannot do without migrant labor.

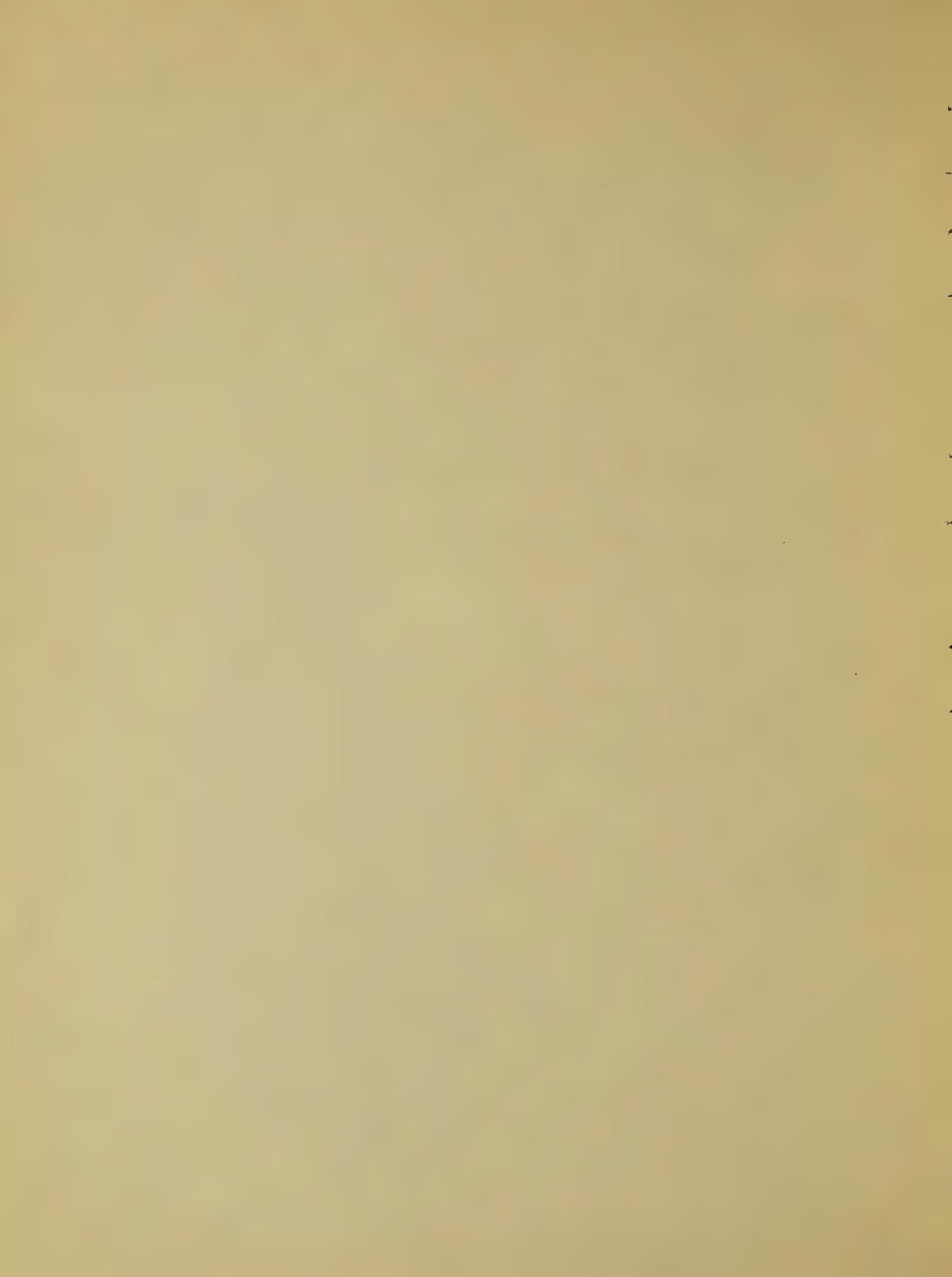
1 farm operator - Local labor can handle the crop this season, but have generally been badly needed in previous seasons; prefers and uses local labor.

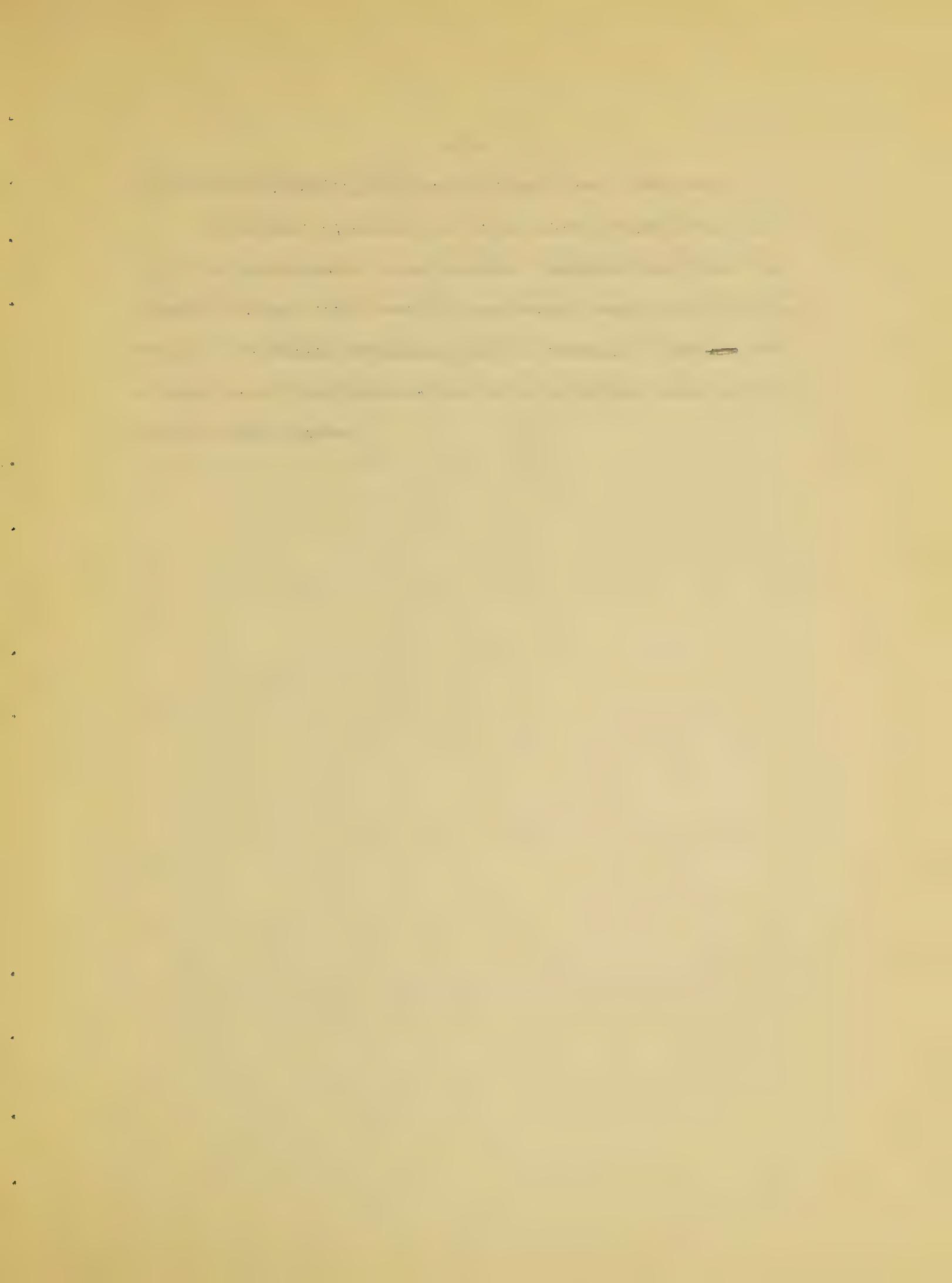
1 farm operator - No opinion expressed about the need for migrants; preferred and used local labor because he felt he ought to patronize his own community.

1 farm operator - Local labor could handle crop "but now 25% are living off the government and won't pick anymore"; "Government has entered farmer's business and should see that help is provided when and where needed"; in favor of government assistance with respect to housing migrants because "there is not sufficient good housing here in this valley."









... several thousand dollars improving housing facilities for his regular and migrant workers. He finds, as a result, that families remain longer - more likely to remain until end of season - so that there is less turn over during season as in previous years - Housing problem has been solved, according to the overseer of the farm - but he predicts that in 2 years they will be in a state of disrepair again as families have no sense of responsibility and mutilate walls, etc. Also, sanitation problem has not been solved for same reason.

Chaves County

Sharing tourist cabin with another family (relatives) ... One small room 6 x 9 and smaller sleeping porch. So cold their beds had to be moved into front room - (6 adults and infant sleeping in this room). Could find no employment on a farm which had housing accommodations - "Plenty of work, but no place to stay." Forced to rent tourist cabin with relatives. Cook together.

Rents 1 room house with another picker in Dexter. Each pays \$1 week. Up to October 28, 1940, lived in 2 room house with another regular worker on farm. Was forced to move by operator to make room for 2 large migrant families for cotton picking season. Resents being forced out and to pay rent because of inadequate housing facilities on farm for its workers.

Family (of eight) occupies 3 room frame house, provided by operator, which is in such state of total disrepair as to be utterly uninhabitable. The windows are broken, the walls are completely covered with rotted newspapers because of the cracks, the roof is almost entirely gone. The floors are broken, the entire atmosphere dismal - Subject states he offered to fix up the place if operator provided materials - operator is "considering" this, but according to subject promised to repair place for last occupant for 3 years without doing so. (heason last occupant left)

No house provided for a group of single men (mostly boys). Subject sleeps with 8 younger men... in a wood-shed; no beds; straw on floor; place overran with rats; no door.

housing program for migratory workers is applied both by the deplorable facilities currently available and by the absence of a minimum standard. In providing decent housing for seasonal workers during the September-December harvest period, consideration must also be given to the families who remain after the season and become part of the ever-increasing population in both counties.

During the months following harvest, many migrant families remain to take advantage of whatever relocation possibilities they can find. They live in quarters no better than those provided for migrants during harvest season. There is much movement up and down the valleys as these families constantly seek better housing as well as better jobs. And the result of this movement is an instability among resident as well as migratory workers in both counties. A labor home program combined with migrant facilities would therefore be essential as a basis for improving the standards among resident as well as migratory workers, and as another major step in the direction of stabilizing the total labor supply.

HEALTH

In the course of the New Mexico survey the health problem was viewed at first within the framework of poor housing, inadequate sanitary facilities, and improper diet. These are the external conditions that combine to undermine the physical well-being of the people with the result that they can neither throw off nor resist disease. And although during the previous few years attention has begun within the migrant areas to the more serious medical situation, there has still been little attention of the laborers. Examination of the rural population has revealed an alarming amount of disease including: rickets, scrofula, tuberculosis, voluntary conditions, and disabilities due to lack of proper medical care during pregnancy, illness, or absence of income. The public health official expressed concern that the public health work (in addition to relief) was frequently not undertaken.

Forthcoming tabulations of disabilities among the migrants in New Mexico will considerably refine our knowledge of the health problem. But the natural limitations of such tabulations prevent a complete view of the situation. Undernourishment, over-exposure, and general debilitation cannot be entirely reflected in tabulations of this kind. It is possible for workers to function for relatively long periods of time at extremely low levels of efficiency and rehabilitation without being aware of specific "disability within the past two months."

Public and private relief agencies in the cotton areas of New Mexico are primarily under the control of local

and provide little or no aid to migrants because of the general lack of funds and necessary facilities. Although local physicians report frequent treatment of migrants, gratis, this treatment does not even scratch the surface of the health problem among the mobile population.

The complaints of farm operators and local residents regarding the shiftlessness, irresponsibility, and general uncouthness of the migrant population essentially constitute a listing of symptoms — symptoms of poor health and bad living conditions. Shiftlessness is more properly correlated with debilitation, chronic illness, and undernourishment than with innate characteristics. Irresponsibility is often exemplified by the fact that migrants tear down parts of barns, sheds, etc., for firewood. More adequate housing facilities could do much to eliminate this type of irresponsibility. And the general rehabilitation of the migrant population through proper housing, adequate medical attention, and increased earning possibilities would prove a basic remedy for uncouthness.

As a practical measure, a healthier and better housed migrant population would contribute substantially to the community by removing the constant threat of epidemic and increasing per capita production among the labor force.

Lack of educational opportunity is the recognized rule among the Indians of our unorganized Pima population. The Indian areas of New Mexico offer no exception to this rule.

Complete records on school enrollment and average daily attendance are available only in Dona Ana County. The following analysis, however, applies specifically to this county. The Indian enrollment in some respects is apparently negligible save those in Santa Fe, where no Indian children are reported. On the basis of information obtained school-officially in Santa Fe, it appears that the greater number of large farms, and consequently very prosperous Indians, make for a smaller decline in average daily attendance during winter planting time, because fewer children leave school for work in the fields. As far as migrant children are concerned, however, the situation is practically identical in both areas.

In Dona Ana County, for the three school years prior to 1940-41, using September as a base, there were increases in enrollment during October, November, and December, ranging from 14.2 to 41.0 percent (see Dona Ana, 1939), while there is relatively high attendance of 7.6 percent. The enrollment of non-migrant children, 264, consists of 17 Indian children, 102 children from neighboring counties who contribute to local commerce. As stated above, considerably slight increases in enrollment and quite slight decreases in classes, there were slight increases in average daily attendance reaching as high as 16.6 percent for the same school years and during the same three months.

It is evident that although relatively slight increases in enrollment are recorded during the course of cotton harvest, large numbers of local resident children are removed from school during this period as reflected by the substantial decreases shown in the average daily attendance figures. It is to be noted incidentally that greatest decrease in attendance corresponds with the peak cotton picking period in summer of each of the three seasons for which complete data appear in the table.

The figures discussed as far evidence extramural from school of local resident children. A negligible number of migrant children are enrolled or attend school from the time they arrive in September through the end of December when cotton picking is over. At this time, however, the migrant children begin to figure more prominently in the local enrollment and school attendance. After harvest season, many migrant families remain in the cotton areas at their studios with the hope of establishing themselves as permanent residents. And at this time they begin to send their children to school. Enrollment increases for three or four months and then begins to taper off as the families find it necessary to leave the area in search of employment. During this period, the schools suffer the effects of recruiting and raiding numbers.

Beginning late in summer and continuing through January in this

* Early cotton picking, supply, and census year of the annually increasing population in both counties.

ENROLLMENT AND AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE IN DONA ANA COUNTY ELEMENTARY
SCHOOLS.*

YEAR	ENROLLMENT	AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE**
1897-98	3,695	3,169
1898-99	3,692	3,165
1899-1900	3,711	3,177
1900-01	3,711	3,177
1901-02	3,711	3,177
1902-03	3,711	3,177
1903-04	3,711	3,177
1904-05	3,711	3,177
1905-06	3,711	3,177
1906-07	3,711	3,177
1907-08	3,711	3,177
1908-09	3,711	3,177
1909-10	3,711	3,177
1910-11	3,711	3,177
1911-12	3,711	3,177
1912-13	3,711	3,177
1913-14	3,711	3,177
1914-15	3,711	3,177
1915-16	3,711	3,177
1916-17	3,711	3,177
1917-18	3,711	3,177
1918-19	3,711	3,177
1919-20	3,711	3,177
1920-21	3,711	3,177
1921-22	3,711	3,177
1922-23	3,711	3,177
1923-24	3,711	3,177
1924-25	3,711	3,177
1925-26	3,711	3,177
1926-27	3,711	3,177
1927-28	3,711	3,177
1928-29	3,711	3,177
1929-30	3,711	3,177
1930-31	3,711	3,177
1931-32	3,711	3,177
1932-33	3,711	3,177
1933-34	3,711	3,177
1934-35	3,711	3,177
1935-36	3,711	3,177
1936-37	3,711	3,177
1937-38	3,711	3,177
1938-39	3,711	3,177
1939-40	3,711	3,177
1940-41	3,711	3,177
1941-42	3,711	3,177
1942-43	3,711	3,177
1943-44	3,711	3,177
1944-45	3,711	3,177
1945-46	3,711	3,177
1946-47	3,711	3,177
1947-48	3,711	3,177
1948-49	3,711	3,177
1949-50	3,711	3,177
1950-51	3,711	3,177
1951-52	3,711	3,177
1952-53	3,711	3,177
1953-54	3,711	3,177
1954-55	3,711	3,177
1955-56	3,711	3,177
1956-57	3,711	3,177
1957-58	3,711	3,177
1958-59	3,711	3,177
1959-60	3,711	3,177
1960-61	3,711	3,177
1961-62	3,711	3,177
1962-63	3,711	3,177
1963-64	3,711	3,177
1964-65	3,711	3,177
1965-66	3,711	3,177
1966-67	3,711	3,177
1967-68	3,711	3,177
1968-69	3,711	3,177
1969-70	3,711	3,177
1970-71	3,711	3,177
1971-72	3,711	3,177
1972-73	3,711	3,177
1973-74	3,711	3,177
1974-75	3,711	3,177
1975-76	3,711	3,177
1976-77	3,711	3,177
1977-78	3,711	3,177
1978-79	3,711	3,177
1979-80	3,711	3,177
1980-81	3,711	3,177
1981-82	3,711	3,177
1982-83	3,711	3,177
1983-84	3,711	3,177
1984-85	3,711	3,177
1985-86	3,711	3,177
1986-87	3,711	3,177
1987-88	3,711	3,177
1988-89	3,711	3,177
1989-90	3,711	3,177
1990-91	3,711	3,177
1991-92	3,711	3,177
1992-93	3,711	3,177
1993-94	3,711	3,177
1994-95	3,711	3,177
1995-96	3,711	3,177
1996-97	3,711	3,177
1997-98	3,711	3,177
1998-99	3,711	3,177
1999-2000	3,711	3,177
2000-01	3,711	3,177
2001-02	3,711	3,177
2002-03	3,711	3,177
2003-04	3,711	3,177
2004-05	3,711	3,177
2005-06	3,711	3,177
2006-07	3,711	3,177
2007-08	3,711	3,177
2008-09	3,711	3,177
2009-10	3,711	3,177
2010-11	3,711	3,177
2011-12	3,711	3,177
2012-13	3,711	3,177
2013-14	3,711	3,177
2014-15	3,711	3,177
2015-16	3,711	3,177
2016-17	3,711	3,177
2017-18	3,711	3,177
2018-19	3,711	3,177
2019-20	3,711	3,177
2020-21	3,711	3,177
2021-22	3,711	3,177
2022-23	3,711	3,177
2023-24	3,711	3,177
2024-25	3,711	3,177
2025-26	3,711	3,177
2026-27	3,711	3,177
2027-28	3,711	3,177
2028-29	3,711	3,177
2029-30	3,711	3,177
2030-31	3,711	3,177
2031-32	3,711	3,177
2032-33	3,711	3,177
2033-34	3,711	3,177
2034-35	3,711	3,177
2035-36	3,711	3,177
2036-37	3,711	3,177
2037-38	3,711	3,177
2038-39	3,711	3,177
2039-40	3,711	3,177
2040-41	3,711	3,177
2041-42	3,711	3,177
2042-43	3,711	3,177
2043-44	3,711	3,177
2044-45	3,711	3,177
2045-46	3,711	3,177
2046-47	3,711	3,177
2047-48	3,711	3,177
2048-49	3,711	3,177
2049-50	3,711	3,177
2050-51	3,711	3,177
2051-52	3,711	3,177
2052-53	3,711	3,177
2053-54	3,711	3,177
2054-55	3,711	3,177
2055-56	3,711	3,177
2056-57	3,711	3,177
2057-58	3,711	3,177
2058-59	3,711	3,177
2059-60	3,711	3,177
2060-61	3,711	3,177
2061-62	3,711	3,177
2062-63	3,711	3,177
2063-64	3,711	3,177
2064-65	3,711	3,177
2065-66	3,711	3,177
2066-67	3,711	3,177
2067-68	3,711	3,177
2068-69	3,711	3,177
2069-70	3,711	3,177
2070-71	3,711	3,177
2071-72	3,711	3,177
2072-73	3,711	3,177
2073-74	3,711	3,177
2074-75	3,711	3,177
2075-76	3,711	3,177
2076-77	3,711	3,177
2077-78	3,711	3,177
2078-79	3,711	3,177
2079-80	3,711	3,177
2080-81	3,711	3,177
2081-82	3,711	3,177
2082-83	3,711	3,177
2083-84	3,711	3,177
2084-85	3,711	3,177
2085-86	3,711	3,177
2086-87	3,711	3,177
2087-88	3,711	3,177
2088-89	3,711	3,177
2089-90	3,711	3,177
2090-91	3,711	3,177
2091-92	3,711	3,177
2092-93	3,711	3,177
2093-94	3,711	3,177
2094-95	3,711	3,177
2095-96	3,711	3,177
2096-97	3,711	3,177
2097-98	3,711	3,177
2098-99	3,711	3,177
2099-2000	3,711	3,177
2000-01	3,711	3,177
2001-02	3,711	3,177
2002-03	3,711	3,177
2003-04	3,711	3,177
2004-05	3,711	3,177
2005-06	3,711	3,177
2006-07	3,711	3,177
2007-08	3,711	3,177
2008-09	3,711	3,177
2009-10	3,711	3,177
2010-11	3,711	3,177
2011-12	3,711	3,177
2012-13	3,711	3,177
2013-14	3,711	3,177
2014-15	3,711	3,177
2015-16	3,711	3,177
2016-17	3,711	3,177
2017-18	3,711	3,177
2018-19	3,711	3,177
2019-20	3,711	3,177
2020-21	3,711	3,177
2021-22	3,711	3,177
2022-23	3,711	3,177
2023-24	3,711	3,177
2024-25	3,711	3,177
2025-26	3,711	3,177
2026-27	3,711	3,177
2027-28	3,711	3,177
2028-29	3,711	3,177
2029-30	3,711	3,177
2030-31	3,711	3,177
2031-32	3,711	3,177
2032-33	3,711	3,177
2033-34	3,711	3,177
2034-35	3,711	3,177
2035-36	3,711	3,177
2036-37	3,711	3,177
2037-38	3,711	3,177

steady increases in enrollment for the school years 1937-38, 1938-39, and 1939-40. These increases are due primarily to the enrollment of migrant children. At the same time we find very substantial increases in average daily attendance due to the return to school of resident children as well as the influx of migrant children.

The first three months of the 1940-41 school year reveal the same general tendencies.

Based on the data provided by the Dona Ana County Superintendent of Schools, the following table shows in detail the percentage increases and decreases of enrollment and average daily attendance during and immediately following cotton harvest.

The proposals for controlling the flow of migrant labor, effectuating a labor exchange system, and providing improved working and living conditions for migratory workers would have an incidental but significant and salutary effect on the problem of education. A smaller and efficiently employed labor force would be more stable, would suffer less the results of keen competition for jobs, would be enabled to derive more per capita income, and would be relieved of the necessity for sending school children out into the cotton fields. Enrollment ~~in~~ school would be more general and attendance more regular; the valleys and peaks of under-attendance and overcrowding would tend to be levelled.

PERCENTAGE INCREASES AND DECREASES
IN ENROLLMENT AND ATTENDANCE DAILY ATTENDANCE
DONA ANA CO. NEW MEXICO ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS *
(Base - September)

- 45 -

	1937-38	1938-39	1939-40
100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1.3	-12.3	2.7	-12.0
-12.3	2.7	-12.0	3.8
2.7	-12.0	3.8	-7.5
-12.0	3.8	-7.5	10.7
3.8	-7.5	10.7	6.2
-7.5	10.7	6.2	11.6
10.7	6.2	11.6	12.1
6.2	11.6	12.1	-
11.6	12.1	-	-
12.1	-	-	-

* Source: Sebille, County Superintendent of Schools, Dona Ana County.

** Average Daily Attendance.

Many workers report that "I always go to church when I'm home", but do not attend church during the seasonal stay in New Mexico. Churches are inaccessible or their "clothes aren't fittin'" or they have the feeling that they are not welcome among the resident churchgoers. There is only a small and negligible group of migrants that manages to establish some contact with a church during the cotton season. A third group—roughly 50 percent or more of the migratory workers—report that they usually do not attend church. And frequently they volunteer a variety of reasons that are indicative of their depressed social and economic status. In several cases seasonal workers sought out and attended prayer meetings of one of the local Pentadostal sects apparently more for recreational than for religious reasons.

Among the commercialized forms of recreation, the movies is the most accessible and is fairly well attended by the seasonal workers. Many, however, are either too far from town or are not able to afford even the nominal admission fee. Occasionally there is a travelling tent show or carnival. For the most part, however, the migratory workers have no recreation except visiting with neighbors or indulging in non-commercialized activities such as cards, dominoes, ball games, and the like.

It is noteworthy that night clubs, "jook joints", and similar forms of recreation are practically unknown in the cotton areas of New Mexico. Such enterprises could hardly thrive on a migrant population.

more or less permanent or family groups

APPENDIX

In both of the New Mexico cotton areas studied, there was considerable receptiveness, particularly among smaller farmers, towards the idea of government assistance with respect to the housing problem. Farmers frequently wondered, "Where will the money come from, how will the government get the money, won't the people have to pay it back eventually?" Usually, these questions embraced all of the government's farm programs. And in most of these instances the immediate need for some alleviation of the housing problem outweighed this financial concern.

In general, farmers who had experienced the difficulties of securing, housing, and retaining migrant labor were favorable to any program that would help relieve this problem. The interviews with farm operators and local officials in both areas would seem to put this group in the majority. Those who had been regularly successful in securing and employing local labor, and those who had solved the problem of housing expressed various attitudes of approval, indifference, and positive opposition. Many of the larger farm owners were, of course, better equipped to house additional labor. Even so, several of these farmers expressed active interest in alleviating the housing problem for the community. In at least one instance, this took the form of suggesting that government grants to farmers for the purpose of building housing units would be more acceptable than government owned camps on government property.

As in other areas in the United States, migrants in New Mexico

are confronted with social ostracism and general antagonism on the part of farm operators and the local population. This antagonism, however, would not seem to have significant bearing on attitudes toward possible housing projects. Indeed, many farmers apparently recognized that one of their outstanding objections to the migrant population - their high turn over and consequent lack of dependability - would be significantly alleviated by sufficient and adequate housing facilities.

It is not to be inferred that opinion was expressed by farmers merely from the perspective of how government assistance would relieve the labor supply problem by providing housing. Expression of opinion frequently took the form of humanitarian concern about the deplorable conditions of the underprivileged migrants. One farmer went so far as to ~~suggest~~ that farm workers were as entitled to some form of parity payment as farm operators.

More opposition to any kind of aid to migrants was encountered among townspeople and local officials than among the farm operators. It is apparent to some extent that this feeling derives from a resentment that the migrant population does not spend its money locally. The opposition of some of the local officials reflected the various problems that a transient population actually or allegedly creates. Although sincerely concerned with the well-being of the migrants, local welfare officials felt that any encouragement to migration by way of better housing would increase the already overtaxed relief facilities. Police officials in both areas reacted to the general disturbance that

the migrants presumably contribute to the community. In one area, a prominent school official had objection to the migrants as a socially undesirable group; an equally prominent official in the other area expressed complete sympathy with the group. Both school officials, however, were concerned about the overcrowding that migration creates in the schools. As has been shown in the above section on education, though overcrowding is somewhat of a problem toward the end of the harvest season, the more serious problem is lack of attendance of both migrant and local resident children during harvest time.

It is to be expected that local opposition will be forthcoming in some measure to any government program of relief to migrants. On the basis of the New Mexico survey, however, it would be reasonable to anticipate a fairly good reception to such a program, especially in view of the threatening labor shortage.

